Concentration participants join in tribute to President Nathan

PARTICIPANTS at an international meeting joined in a tribute to President S R Nathan for his contributions to Singapore and his role in deepening the country’s engagement with the South Asian diaspora.

Ambassador Gopinath Pillai, chairman of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) which organised the inaugural South Asian Diaspora Convention, noted that Mr Nathan facilitated many connections and interactions between Singapore and South Asians.

He encouraged South Asian communities here to hold international meetings and urged ISAS to develop platforms to engage the South Asian community. Mr Pillai said at a gala dinner last night.

"President Nathan has a long-held view that Singapore is a natural hub for the South Asian diaspora. As a city-state that owes its origins and subsequent growth to the energy and enterprise of immigrants from all over Asia, Singapore has become a vibrant and cosmopolitan global city deeply connected to all parts of the world, especially the rising economies of Asia," he said.

Mr Nathan was the “driving force” behind the Encyclopaedia of the Indian Diaspora published in 2006, and the conference here was first mooted by him.

Mr Pillai said Mr Nathan, who steps down when his second six-year term ends on Aug 31, "served with distinction".

He thanked the President for "touching the lives of so many Singaporeans with his wisdom, humanity and kindness".

Tracing Mr Nathan’s five-decade-long public service career, he said Mr Nathan left “his indelible mark on the labour movement in Singapore” while serving in the National Trades Union Congress.

And in the Ministry of Defence, "he proved himself to be a selfless man with extraordinary courage", Mr Pillai said, recounting the 1974 incident when Mr Nathan negotiated with hijackers of the La'at passenger ferry to secure the release of hostages.

"President Nathan has described the simple code by which he lives with the one word: Duty," he said.

Guests at the dinner at Resorts World Sentosa, including Emeritus Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, also joined in a belated celebration of Mr Nathan’s 87th birthday, which fell on July 3.

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